New York
Theatre Critics' Reviews
1950

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**Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 30, 1950*

Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN — NEW YORK WORLD TELEGRAM & THE SUN
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"As You Like It"

Daily Mirror

January 27, 1950

'As You Like It' at Cort In Superb Production

By ROBERT COLEMAN

The Theatre Guild brought the handsomest Shakespearean production we have seen in our time to the Cort Theatre last evening. The play is "As You Like It," starring Katharine Hepburn. The stunning sets and costumes are by James Bailey, and merit mention right up top in a notice, as does the original and inventive direction by Michael Benthall.

The Bailey settings and costumes must have cost a fortune. They are feasts for the eyes. Benthall's staging uses them ably to achieve fluidity and avoid lulls. The major scenes are linked together with movement that almost assumes the proportions of ballet.

Not only has Benthall made fewer cuts in the script than are customary, but he has included the traditional songs and incidental music, arranged by Robert Irving. He has mannered the speech of the players more in the mode of modern realism than in that of the sound-and-fury school. He has substituted high spirits and a youthful approach for what might be called stature.

Some dyed-in-the-wool Shakespeareans aren't going to like Benthall's conception. They are going to miss the majestic gesture and the stentorian tone. Personally, we like it. After all. "As You Like It" isn't "Hamlet" or "Macbeth." It is a gay and rollicking comedy, though it has some of Shakespeare's most beautiful and trenchant speeches.

Miss Hepburn plays Rosalind just as you would expect her to. She is lovely as a girl and an effective tomboy when she turns to male disguise. She reads her lines with that peculiar, rather nasal intonation that has become her trademark. We think her fans will relish her performance as much as did a majority of the first-nighters.

Ernest Thesiger, a Shakespearean veteran, is an excellent melancholy Jacques. His readings of the famous "Ages of Man" and "All the world's a stage" passages were delivered in a low, restrained, almost confidential voice, but were quite moving.

Others meriting salutes are William Prince, Ernest Graves, Aubrey Mather, Cloris Leachman, Bill Owen, Jay Robinson, Whitford Kane, Robert Quarry, Judy Parrish and Patricia England.

Perhaps you enjoy robust Shakespeare. Perhaps you do not care for elaborate detail and delicacy, preferring broad and bold strokes. If so, you may not share our enthusiasm for the Theatre Guild's magnificent production of "As You Like It." But we have a hunch that most playgoers are going to share our enthusiasm. Cole Porter certainly did. He sat behind us last evening and blistered his palms applauding.

"AS YOU LIKE IT"

Comedy by William Shakespeare; conceived and staged by Robert Irving; scenery and costumes by James Bailey; incidental music by Robert Irving; production under the supervision of Theresa Helburn and Lawrence Langner; presented by the Theatre Guild at the Cort Theatre, January 26, 1950. The cast:

Orlando.....William Prince
Adam.....Burton Mallory
Oliver.....Ernest Graves
Dennis.....Robert Foster
Charles.....Michael Everett
Celia.....Cloris Leachman
Rosalind....Katharine Hepburn
Touchstone.....Bill Owen
Le Beau.....Jay Robinson
Frederick.....Dayton Lummis
Lady in Waiting..Jan Sherwood
Duke.....Aubrey Mather
Amiens.....Frank Rogier
Lord.....Everett Gamnon
Corin.....Whitford Kane
Silvius.....Robert Quarry
Jaques.....Ernest Thesiger
Phebe.....Judy Parrish
Audrey.....Patricia Englund
Sir Oliver Martext..Jay Robinson
William.....Robert Foster
Rowland.....Craig Timberlake

Synopsis: Part I—The grounds of Oliver's house. A Pavilion at the Palace of Frederick. Oliver's House. The Forest of Arden. Part II—The Forest of Arden.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 27, 1950

Hepburn Is No Mean Gam-in 'As You Like It' as Rosalind

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

Katharine wins the title Gams Hepburn with her appearance as Rosalind in the Guild's new production of "As You Like It."

This is the star's first tussle with Shakespeare, and she comes off the winner over classic cheesecake, as she has with most of her career. A rustic revel of a play, which might have been written for May Day at a girls' boarding school, it is a generally happy choice for Miss Hepburn.

She looks like a high-bred swan as the banished daughter of a previously banished Duke. When she dresses as a boy for safe transit through the forest, abbreviated costumes not only make the nickname Gams inevitable, but in modern competition classify the star as a cover girl, full length.

Some 'Get Thee Gones.'

You may recall that "As You Like It" concerns some elaborate "get-thee-gone" switches from a certain Dukedom into the Forest of Arden and back again. Rosalind goes to the woods because her uncle decides she is an untrustworthy companion for his daughter Celia. But Celia goes along because she cannot live without Rosalind.

Orlando gets him to the thickets because his wicked elder brother keeps bribing wrestlers to waylay him. Because this is all a masque, Rosalind keeps on pretending she is a lad, which is not meant to fool anybody, but gives rise to many pretty speeches.

Some of the best and most lightly fantastical scenes of the play are those in which the disguised Rosalind acts like Orlando's love (actually herself) in order to cure him. Usually he turns out to be more temptation than she can stand. In the end, though, everybody tells the truth, everybody gets married and everybody comes out of banishment.

Fairy-Story Settings.

The Guild has given the comedy a bright, lovely production, with fairy-story settings, exquisite costumes and plenty of music and song. This is just the sort of treatment "As You Like it" needs, and it could not have been applied more gracefully.

Most of the play is sheer froth, and everybody in it knows it. There is just one quality about the performance of Miss Hepburn's that seems underdone. Here is a girl whose reputation is largely built on individuality, and the impression she usually gives of doing things her own way. For Rosalind she seems overtrained.

She knows how to pronounce the verse all right, and certainly she is mobile and graceful. Every once in a while she comes up with a reading in that Down East Granny's voice of hers that is wry, sharp and as witty as it is timeless, and the audience hurls a gust of laughter at her that clearly jolts her back on her heels.

Is Pure Hepburn.

That kind of thing is pure Hepburn, as her line to Phebe: "Sell when you can; you are not for all markets." More of it could only spice Rosalind. It can't hurt Shakespeare.

William Prince is an eager lover, so youthful in appearance and behavior that you forgive Orlando's single-minded and gullible behavior. Cloris Leachman is an entirely charming and attentive Celia, while Bill Owen is a bright Touchstone and Aubrey Mather a fatherly Duke.

If you have ever seen "As You Like It" before, this production is lovelier, and if you have never seen it, this is as easy a way as you will ever be offered to get it off the list.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
January 27, 1950

Shakespeare Delightfully Done
By Richard Watts Jr.

The Theatre Guild production of "As You Like It," which opened at the Cort last night, is a triumph for everyone concerned, even Shakespeare. It has always been my sullen impression that this pastoral potboiler was one of the dullest and silliest plays a man of genius ever wrote, but now, aided by Michael Benthall's imaginative staging, James Bailey's charming sets, and the glowing Rosalind of the fascinating Katharine Hepburn, the lyric grace and sweetness of the text come alive, and the result is an evening of theatrical enchantment.

After seeing "As You Like It" done with such artful magic, it is difficult to remember how incredibly tedious a comedy it can be, and usually is. Forgotten are the absurdities that ordinarily make it so trying, the feeble buffoonery of Touchstone, the silliness of the disguises that fool lovers into thinking that their sweethearts are unknown boys, the fatuousness of the last-minute reformation and atonement of the villains. Instead, there is a wonderful air of innocence and freshness, a vision of a day when all the world was young, to provide an idyllic beauty that is irresistible.

Miss Hepburn

There are many contributors to the success of the presentation, but I should like first of all to do some cheering for Miss Hepburn. As a long-time admirer of this frank and courageous young woman, I was proud of her last night. Making no compromises with that bravely individual style which drives people to either enthusiasm or distraction, she plays with such spirit, tenderness, humor, grace and vitality, and looks so beautiful, that her Rosalind becomes a characterization of sheer loveliness. No actress I have ever seen in this celebrated role has approached her in bringing it to poetic life.

One of the immense virtues of the production is that all of the actors play it with a realization that the speeches have both meaning and poetry and that they are appearing in a story which deserves to be interpreted as well as recited. Style in the theatre is something intangible enough to be easier to feel and appreciate than describe, but there is always a sense of it in this "As You Like It," giving the performance life, beauty and grace, and maintaining the needed mood of lyric but humorous sweetness.

The Players

The performances are both well-spoken and engagingly done. William Prince is remarkably successful in making Orlando a proper romantic figure without inanity or stuffiness. Ernest Thesiger reads the famous speeches of Jaques admirably and puts relish into the wry humor of the melancholy philosopher. Bill Owen cannot make Touchstone funny but he does succeed in keeping him alive. Cloris Leachman as Celia, Aubrey Mather as the banished duke, Whitford Kane as the old shepherd, Judy Parrish as Phebe, and, indeed, all of the other players succeed wonderfully in keeping minor characters from being stock figures.

James Bailey's sets are handsome and delightfully in the spirit of the occasion, and, for the first time in my memory, make the forest of Arden the place of idyllic enchantment it is intended to be. The incidental music arranged by Robert Irving is excellent, and Frank Rogier sings the Shakespearean songs charmingly. As for Mr. Benthall's staging, it is a brilliant work of creative imagination in every way. I never thought I could become fond of "As You Like It," but in the current production it is a joy.

Journal-American
January 26, 1950

Hepburn Is Cheered For 'Rosalind' Role
By ROBERT GARLAND

You need but contemplate the title to discover how William Shakespeare felt about his "As You Like It," which The Theatre Guild brings to the Cort ornately endowed with canvas, clothes, music and Katharine Hepburn in all three of her dimensions.

Along with some fine fellow his trios, Miss Hepburn gives the impression that she evaluates her current acting vehicle more illustriously than did its titularly contemptuous creator. I, in the unadmirable minority, am on the author's side.

But, for all I know to the contrary, the unstarred star of this one of the master's several overestimated make-believes may still be taking bows on the sunny side of the Forthy-eight Street footlight. Katharine Hepburn's was a genuine ovation.

Last night, after the epilogue had been spoken and the first of the final curtains lowered, I remained for Miss Hepburn's sixteenth curtain call and the simple "Thank you" which was included in it. After that, with bravos ringing in my ears, I came away.

I came away in time to tell you about it; how, having at last seen "As You Like It" in its most sumptuous bib and tucker, if I never see "As You Like It" again it will be quite all right with me. As for the poetry, that is better read than heard.

• • •

Stacks Up Well

First performed here on John Street ten years after America's independence, I took up with "As You Like It" beyond the century's turn. Then, the Ben Greet Players, hedge-hopping in Baltimore, had Sybil Thorndike as their Rosalind.

Since (the now) Dame Sybil's, I have seen the Rosalinds of Henrietta Crossman, Julia Marlowe, Margaret Anglin, Edith Wynne Matthison, Marjorie Rambeau, Viola Allen, Katherine Emery, Helen Craig, Rosalind Iden and a lady known as Russell.

The Rosalind of Katharine Hepburn stacks up well beside them. Miss Hepburn, her not-too-pleasant voice Constance-Collierized past immediate recognition, gets better as she goes along. Her comedy, in what is now the second act, is her best.

Lovely, at times, and always long and leggy, Broadway's prodigal daughter makes a good looking girl and a not too pretty boy. Along with the other Rosalinds that have come and gone, she gets away with her girlish Ganymede.

She gets away with the masquerade because Orlando, the youngest and most short-sighted, deaf-eared and dim-witted son of Sir Rowland de Boys, fails to recognize his own true love when he hears her speak and holds her in his arms to kiss her.

• • •

It's an Eyeful

Remaining with the ladies, Judy Parrish and Patricia Englund manage to make Phebe, the silly shepherdess, and Audrey, the wearying wench, as painless as possible. Anyway, you get less of them than of their male countrified contemporaries.

But every witless wanderer in the Forest of Arden—Adam, the ancient; Charles, the wrestler; Touchstone, the clown; Corin, the shepherd; William, the bumpkin—is hard to take and their impersonaters are more than the originals deserve.

As Orlando, most short-sighted, deaf-eared and dim-witted of all classic on-stage lovers, William Prince is a health-and-strength-ful cover-boy. Save for an occasional un-Shakespearean "r", he speaks up and out with ease.

Whitford Kane, his foot well out of Ophelia's open grave, is a pleasant sight to see. Aubrey Mather, as the duke in banishment, is ditto. Jay Robinson, as the Mayfairy-like Le Beau, is what is ordered. So are Bill Owen as Touchstone and Ernest Thesiger as Jaques . . .

Conceived, and directed, by Michael Benthall, backgrounded and costumed by James Bailey, musicalized by Robert Irving and Rosalinded by Katharine Hepburn, The Theatre Guild's "As You Like It" is as you like it—if you do. Even if you do not, it is an eyeful!

NEW YORK
Herald Tribune
January 27, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Hepburn in Tights

KATHARINE HEPBURN is back on Broadway, starring in a sumptuous production of William Shakespeare's dislocated comedy, "As You Like It." While it is good to see her paying a bow to the Bard of Avon, she might have picked a better Elizabethan drama for her new alliance with the theater at the Cort. Michael Benthall's redaction of the work in two lovely and laggard acts retains much of the eloquence and fantasy of the original. Miss Hepburn is assisted by such knowing players as William Prince, Ernest Thesiger and Aubrey Mather. Moreover, there are incidental songs by Robert Irving to weave a spell of magic around the high jinks in the Forest of Arden.

* * *

The truth is that "As You Like It" is a rather sorry comedy, depending on the master's gift for creating infinite images out of language rather than his subtle knowledge of human experience. There are scenes in which Miss Hepburn latches on to the poetic beauty of the piece and makes one forget that she is a girl impersonating a youth. For much of the time she reads her lines with a strident insistency that becomes uncomfortable for the spectator. Thesiger, as the melancholy Jaques, is far better at capturing the verbal delight of a play which plays with words rather than consequential situations.

* * *

The conventions of Shakespeare's time, when boys played feminine roles and the idea of identical twins was uproarious, are difficult to take, even in this munificent Theater Guild production. There is a woeful lack of surprise in the fact that a lad who has taken refuge in the woods with his sister turns out to be the beloved Rosalind of Orlando, who coaches the latter in courtship. Miss Hepburn plays the role to the hilt, but she is very obviously Miss Hepburn in tights. The dialogue is filled with magnificence, but it has scattered significance. Even the brilliant settings and costumes by James Bailey merely serve to accentuate the lack of dramatic and comic power in this revival.

Thesiger is superb as Jacques, reciting the seven stages of man with detached serenity and adding to the curious complications of the comedy on several other occasions. Prince plays Orlando with a proper lovelorn intensity and Mather is fine as the banished duke who presides over an assembly of followers who wear antlers on their heads. Cloris Leachman portrays Celia with a pretty impetuosity and Bill Owen gives a good account of himself as Touchstone, the clown. Whitford Kane, Judy Parrish, Patricia Englund and Ernest Graves are some of the many others who participate in "As You Like It." Here is a handsome and somewhat dull resurrection of a comedy which defeats most of Miss Hepburn's efforts to give it warmth and vitality.

The New York Times
January 27, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

If it is not ungallant to say so, Rosalind in "As You Like It" is not Katharine Hepburn's best part. Under the protection of the Theatre Guild, she has brought the character and the play to the Cort, where Shakespeare's rustic revels were performed last evening. Gorgeously attired in some stunning finery designed by James Bailey, Miss Hepburn is lovely to look at, and she plays the part with pride and modesty.

* * *

But in the opinion of one reluctantly churlish theatregoer, Rosalind assumes romantic and disarming graces that are not implicit in Miss Hepburn's signature. She is an honest and straightforward actress whom it is easy to admire. But she is not a helpless, bewitched, moonstruck maiden swooning through a magic forest. There is too much Yankee in Miss Hepburn for Shakespeare's glades and lyric fancies.

The comedy is better than you think. Although the plot is silly, "As You Like It" is enchanting if it is played with rapture. Like "Twelfth Night," it radiates the most lovable qualities of Shakespeare's youth. The inhumanities of man for man are only matters of form. For Shakespeare, in the flush of success and popularity, is writing of kindness and gentleness, of loyalty and good-will, of pleasantries between people of sweet natures who have escaped the world of ambition and evil. The freshness of youth shines through the sunny aisles of this pastoral comedy.

Miss Hepburn has too sharply defined a personality for such romantic make-believe. Her acting is tight; her voice is a little hard and shallow for Shakespeare's poetry; she has to design the character too meticulously. And is this a New England accent that we hear twanging the strings of Shakespeare's lyre? Miss Hepburn's acting lacks the softness and warmth that commend Rosalind so passionately to Orlando.

Unfortunately, the production does not exactly suit her. It would be better suited to Sir Henry Irving than to Miss Hepburn or any of her contemporaries. Under Michael Benthall's heavy-accented direction, the performance is singularly busy, which is perhaps not the ideal environment for love; and it is equipped with bird songs, owl hoots, a snowstorm, garlanded processionals, wood smoke, choruses, a fine chamber orchestra; and it is spiced with several episodes of egregious horseplay. Although Mr. Bailey's feminine costumes are lovely, his wood-notes wild in the Forest of Arden are literal and ponderous. They remind the theatregoer of nothing so much as the fact that the scenery is counterfeit.

* * *

Even in these unlikely circumstances, some of the acting is admirable. William Prince's manly Orlando is able and enjoyable, and so is Cloris Leachman's capricious Celia. Aubrey Mather's cheerful and hospitable Duke living in banishment is an attractive piece of work. And that well-loved worthy, Whitford Kane, acts an amiable Corin with knowledge of Shakespeare and a wholesome independence of the rest of the performance.

But Ernest Thesiger's pedantic Jaques leaves the play destitute of one of its richest characters. There is not much pleasure in this overproduced and under-acted frolic in an amorous forest.

DAILY NEWS
January 27, 1950

Hepburn an Attractive Rosalind In Guild's Lovely 'As You Like It'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

As Katharine Hepburn herself might say, she has the "figgeh" for playing Rosalind in Shakespeare's "As You Like It," so play it she did last evening at the Cort Theatre in a really beautiful Theatre Guild production. She has a bit more than a figgeh, too, for this role of a girl who poses as a boy in the most complicated comedy ever played amidst three trees in a woodland glade. She has a nice sense of comedy and considerable skill at timing this comedy.

Opposite her, as Orlando, is William Prince, who looks more like James Barton than Spencer Tracy—and Mr. Prince also has a very good figgeh for Shakespearean tights. Between them they manage to make considerable love when Shakespeare isn't interrupting their idyll with tales of dukes, banished dukes, wicked brothers, lion fights and repentant villains.

Lovely Production.

There is extraordinary loveliness and fluidity in the mounting and direction of the comedy. James Bailey's woodland settings, which show both Winter and Spring in the Forest of Arden, have charm and delicacy and, at the same time, strong visual impact. Michael Benthall—like Mr. Bailey a Briton—has directed the affair with the idea of creating as much movement as possible. Except for the scenes in which Mr. Prince is wooing Miss Hepburn and vice-versa, somebody is always skipping or traipsing about the stage quite prettily.

A further charming element in this tree-girt idyll is the music, written or arranged by Robert Irving, which is sung by an attractive chorus of country lads and lasses.

Thesiger Has Authority.

In the role of Jacques, the melancholy man who says that all the world's a stage and who later bows himself off by saying he is going to live in a cave and get away from it all, Ernest Thesiger is quite right, and, knowing he is right, he has the quiet authority of a good Shakespearean actor.

Aubrey Mather plays cheerily as the Banished Duke; Cloris Leachman is an attractive Celia, and Bill Owen gets some good low comedy as well as the traditional posturings into the part of Touchstone, the jester. The large company has been most beautifully costumed by the same James Bailey who created the scenery.

There was quite a posh crowd at the Cort last evening to greet Miss Hepburn on her first Broadway appearance in seven years, including a number of the lady's fellow stars from Hollywood. After a pleasant evening was over I fell into a fit of fancy and began to imagine what happened after Rosalind and Orlando were married in that beautiful bucolic finale. I imagined that Rosalind was still wearing the pants in the family.

"The Happy Time"

The New York Times

January 25, 1950

'The Happy Time,' Comedy About a French-Canadian Family in the Twenties

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Not having written any works of art for a month or two, the Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein have produced a very enjoyable family comedy, "The Happy Time," which was happily acted at the Plymouth last evening. It is a humorous sketch of French-Canadian customs and manners in the early Twenties. Samuel Taylor has written it out of a book of the same title by Robert Fontaine, and some ingratiating comedians play it with general good nature.

To tell the truth, it is not exactly a work of art. For the first half of it is about as subtle as some fireside jokes in a patent-medicine almanac. And Robert Lewis, who added a few cubits to his stature with the direction of "Regina," has staged the first half of "The Happy Time" as though he were burlesquing stock-company acting of before the first World War. A prudent theatregoer could take his departure from the Plymouth half way through the evening under the impression that he was closing the door on some kollege komics.

* * *

But that is the time when Mr. Taylor starts writing a civilized comedy and Mr. Lewis starts directing it with taste. The amorous and good-hearted brothers Bonnard become human beings, and Bibi, the adolescent son of one of the brothers, has certain youth problems that are both comic and disarming.

Bibi's mother is a Scotswoman and she worries lest the wine-bibbing and the philandering of her husband and his brothers will contribute to Bibi's juvenile delinquency. But the point of "The Happy Time" is that the sins of the flesh are only peccadilloes if people are honest and loyal and if a family stands together. Both Mr. Taylor and the Bonnards are right as soon as they quit truckling to the audience and seriously consider the problem of adjusting Bibi to the normally inhibited world.

* * *

Fortunately Mr. Lewis has had the good taste to cast the comedy perfectly. It would be impossible to improve on Claude Dauphin's performance as the amiable father. Light of touch, sunny by nature and warm-spirited, Mr. Dauphin is perfect. He is well matched by Leora Dana in the part of the Scots mother. Last season she captivated the town with a brief but rhapsodic speech in "The Madwoman of Chaillot." This is a different kind of part, but she has the dash and style to play it well.

And don't overlook the breezy comic acting of the others—Richard Hart as the philanderer, Kurt Kasznar as the lover of wine, Edgar Stehli as an aging stag who still knows his way around town, Eva Gabor as a fascinating blonde, Mary Aurelius as a scold, and James O'Rear as a gauche but giggling suitor. Johnny Stewart plays the part of the adolescent painlessly, and Marlene Cameron is amusing as his girl. Aline Bernstein has come away from her drawing-board with the setting-design for a hospitable and livable general room in a pleasant Ottawa home.

Since Mr. Taylor has an appreciative attitude toward the foibles of ordinary people, "The Happy Time" might have been a fine and touching piece of folk literature. But for an act and a half he and Mr. Lewis are too eager to crack jokes. All at once they slam the door on the corn crib and settle down to the business of writing and staging an adult comedy. They are well advised to use their material like craftsmen. For the second half of "The Happy Time" is tender, gallant and funny, and close enough to the truth to dismiss the audience in a glow of good spirits.

"THE HAPPY TIME"

Comedy by Samuel Taylor, based on the novel by Robert Fontaine; staged by Robert Lewis; scenery and costumes by Aline Bernstein; presented by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2d at the Plymouth Theatre, January 24, 1950. The cast:

Bibi.....Johnny Stewart
Papa.....Claude Dauphin
Maman.....Leora Dana
Grandpere.....Edgar Stehli
Uncle Desmonde..Richard Hart
Uncle Louis.....Kurt Kasznar
Aunt Felice.....May Aurelius
Mignonette.....Eva Bagor
Sally.....Marlene Cameron
Doctor Gagnon....Gage Clarke
Alfred.....James O'Rear
Mr. Frye.....Oliver Cliff

Synopsis: The action of the play takes place in Ottawa in the early '20s. Act I. Scene 1. The living room of the Bonnard home. Early fall. Scene 2. The same. Six months later. Act II. Scene 1. The living room of the Bonnard home. One month later. Scene 2. The same. Next day. Act III. Scene 1. The Principal's office, immediately following. Scene 2. The living room, immediately following.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 25, 1950

'The Happy Time' Is All of That; It Brims With Tender Humor

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

If everybody could survive the first pangs of growing up under the charmed guidance of as understanding and delightful a family as the one in "The Happy Time," the world would be a vastly improved place.

Young Bibi is on the verge of his teens, when life suddenly takes on new confusion as problems of love and honor appear on his horizon.

His French-Canadian family is a lusty-living crew. Grandfather gally pursues a local widow and, when warned about his stamina, insists that anyone who knows a better way to die, step forward.

Uncle's a Wolf.

Uncle Desmonde is a slick and charming wolf, who prefers the life of a traveling salesman and has a unique collection of garters collected from burlesque shows. Uncle Louis has long since decided that one career in his family is enough, and since his wife insists on dressmaking, he devotes himself to drinking wine out of a water cooler he carries around with him.

Bibi's father is a pretty normal fellow except for the distinction of playing fiddle in the band of the vaudeville house, which leads a lot of people carelessly to dismiss him as a crazy musician. Mother is a lovable soul, a Scottish Presbyterian, who nobly tries to keep the men in the family from treating Bibi as a grown man.

Things start buzzing when Papa brings home a beautiful Hungarian acrobat who is out of a job. She is to help Maman around the house, which suits everybody, except that she also wins the hearts of an unwilling Desmonde and the wide-eyed Bibi.

Bibi's Awakening.

After holding hands with this lovely Mignonette at a Valentino movie, Bibi might be said to have awakened. In a slightly confused but utterly natural curiosity about the female form divine, he hides Mignonette's nightgowns, and comes close to breaking up her romance with Desmonde.

He also runs into a confusing problem about truth when he is unjustly accused of drawing daring pictures of a teacher at school. The brutal principal, who beat him, is straightened out in a wonderful sequence when the three brothers prove to this man that truth obtained by force is highly questionable.

Bibi's curiosity about Mignonette is assuaged when Papa explains to him that only later on will he understand his desires, and that he must always think of them as natural. Papa agrees with Grandfather that Bibi may consider himself a man when he learns to use his glands, his heart and his mind together correctly.

The play's focus rarely leaves this early stirring of maturity in a young boy. It is written with brimming heart, infinite taste and the most luxurious humor.

Principals Lauded.

Everybody connected with it should be lauded, for they have all contributed intelligence and love, and their efforts have jelled. Claude Dauphin is subtle and winning as Papa and Leora Dana is a pliant reed of good intentions as Maman. Young Johnny Stewart plays Bibi with the aplomb and deftness of a veteran, capturing the role's many moods with authority.

Richard Hart is a lighthearted Desmonde, gay and confident, and Eva Gabor is lovely as the girl who captures him. Edgar Stehli is a jaunty, dynamic grandfather and Marlene Cameron is little short of fabulous as Bibi's eventual nemesis. But of the whole family, no one is more delightfully funny than Kurt Kasznar as Louis the lovable lush. His violent argument with a prospective son-in-law over whether the future children will go to college is a hilarious joy.

Aline Bernstein has set the play in a warm provincial atmosphere, and Robert Lewis has directed it with infinite tenderness and gaiety.

Daily Mirror

January 25, 1950

'The Happy Time' Another Rodgers, Hammerstein Hit

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Several seasons ago Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein gave us a smash hit called "I Remember Mama." It was about a wonderful Scandinavian family. Now they've given us another smash hit called "The Happy Time," which could be sub-titled, "I Remember Mama and Papa." It is about a wonderful French-Canadian family.

"The Happy Time" has been dramatized by Samuel Taylor from Robert Fontaine's nostalgic book of the same title. The story, as it comes to the stage, is reminiscent of Eugene O'Neill's "Ah, Wilderness," with the wacky overtones of "You Can't Take It With You." It is a glowing and charming account of a youngster's early experiences in Ottawa, Canada.

The Bonnards were an extraordinary family, loyal, honest, imaginative, and in love with life and love. Bibi's papa was a gentle, kindly, understanding musician. His uncles were a wine salesman with a roving eye and wine bibber with a hatred of work. His mother was as sympathetic as any good mother should be. His grandfather was a philosopher and a gallant. And the in-laws and neighbors were almost as interesting.

Son Bibi's French-Canadian family, even his Scottish mother, had a more realistic outlook on life than would the average American family. It was anything but straitlaced. "La Vie Parisienne" was considered a humorous rather than a naughty magazine. Romance and love were as natural to them as breathing or sharing the contents of the wine bottles on the sideboard.

Producers Rodgers and Hammerstein have given director Robert Lewis a fine cast to act one of this or any season's most delightful plays. We liked particularly Claude Dauphin's affectionate Papa. It was not showy or bravura, but it was from the heart. We liked also Johnny Stewart's Bibi. After seeing this youngster handle so difficult a role so beautifully, we're not going to worry about the future of our theatre.

This semester, incidentally, has been notable for its harvest of juvenile players. The drama is going to be in good hands a few years hence, when they become our leading men and ladies.

Richard Hart and Kurt Kasznar are fascinating as the uncles. Ditto Edgar Stehli as the sage and indomitable grandpere. Leora Dana, as Maman, and Eva Gabor, as an adopted member of the Bonnard household, are joys. Salutes also are due Mary Aurelius, Marlene Cameron, Gage Clarke, James O'Rear and Oliver Cliff for other contributions.

"The Happy Time" made us so happy that we would like to go on talking about it indefinitely, but space and a deadline prevent. Anyway, were we to tell you more, it would only spoil your enjoyment of a tremendously amusing and heart-warming comedy.

That Rodgers and Hammerstein! Not content with giving us "South Pacific," they have to go and give us another enchanted evening in the theatre. They have to give us another show for which there aren't going to be enough tickets to go around.

DAILY NEWS

NEW YORK'S PICTURE NEWSPAPER

January 25, 1950

'The Happy Time' an Affectionate Family Comedy, Splendidly Acted

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The producing firm of Rodgers and Hammerstein needs another hit as much as it needs the proverbial round aperture in the skull—but it's got one in Samuel Taylor's "The Happy Time," which opened last evening at the Plymouth Theatre. I'm beginning to feel sorry for these two nice fellows, and for Mike Mok, their press agent, and for me and all other theatre reporters, because all our friends and nodding acquaintances are going to have their birthdays and wedding anniversaries all over again and ask us if we can get them a pair for day after tomorrow.

"The Happy Time," based on a collection of stories by Robert Fontaine, is a folksy, affectionate comedy about a merry and philosophical French-Canadian family living in Ottawa in the early 20s. It starts mildly and quietly and builds steadily toward a finish which brings yells of laughter. It is adroitly acted by the pleasantest lot of people you'd ever want to meet, and it has been directed by Robert Lewis, who is a very good man indeed.

A Carefree Tribe.

The Bonnards are a carefree family. Papa plays the violin and conducts the orchestra in a theatre. Maman is a Scotch Presbyterian whose notions of propriety are tolerantly ignored by all her French relatives. Their son, Bibi, is on the brink of adolescence and in his case it is indeed a perilous brink.

Then there is Uncle Louis, who has spent 20 years of married life not working and drinking white wine from a water cooler. There is handsome Uncle Desmonde, a traveling salesman who likes to collect ladies' garters. He gets most of them when ladies throw them to burlesque show audiences, having devised a technique of spearing them in midair with his cane—but he boasts that many of them have been acquired no less skillfully but somewhat less delicately.

There is Grandpere, a happy, tolerant, wise and goatish old fellow. There is Mignonette, a beautiful girl who lost her job with a troupe of acrobats—her job was to look pretty and throw rosined kerchiefs to the performers—and who has been taken into the house as a servant.

A Series of Sketches.

There are some others — Uncle Louis' shrewish wife, the suitor of Uncle Louis' daughter, the little girl next door who is having her teeth straightened, a doctor who comes once to attend Grandpere and orders the old boy to bed, and a sniffish and nasty school principal.

"The Happy Time" is really a series of sketches, all of them comic, centered around young Bibi's awful business of growing up. As Bibi, Johnny Stewart gives a grand performance. All of the performances are grand, for that matter. Claude Dauphin has fine French humor as the father, and the scene in which he tells his son the facts of life is a fine mixture of tenderness and gentle comedy. Leora Dana is sweetly helpless as the mother, and as Uncle Louis, Kurt Kasznar is immense, physically and in his acting. A fine scene is where Louis interviews his daughter's timid suitor.

Richard Hart has the right dash as the traveling salesman, Edgar Stehli is properly raffish as the grandfather, Eva Gabor makes a beautiful and appealing ex-assistant of acrobats, and another youngster, Marlene Cameron, scores as Bibi's unwanted girl. I'd say my favorite scene of all is the one in which Gage Clarke, the doctor, comes to examine Grandpere.

Congratulations to Mr. Rodgers, Mr. Hammerstein, Mr. Taylor, Mr. Fontaine, Mr. Lewis, Mr. Shubert, Aline Bernstein (who did sets and costumes) and all members of the cast at the Plymouth. Congratulations also to my friends, to people I have met casually and to people I have never heard of but soon will upon their birthdays, wedding anniversaries and attempts to get out of the doghouse. To the latter multitudes I'd say, "If you want to see 'The Happy Time,' and I think you'd enjoy it, tickets can be had at the theatre, by mail or at brokers' stores if you plan ahead."

New York Post
HOME NEWS
January 25, 1950

Some French-Canadian Nostalgia
By Richard Watts Jr.

Since the comparison of new plays to established hits is one of the favorite parlor games of theatre addicts, it takes more strength of character than I possess to avoid saying that "The Happy Time," which opened at the Plymouth last night, is in various ways reminiscent of "Life With Father," "You Can't Take It with You," "I Remember Mama," and, in a fairly far-fetched manner, "The Member of the Wedding." It happens that I do not care for it as much as I admire any of its illustrious predecessors, but it does have a few points as entertainment.

The casual and easygoing tale of a picturesque and somewhat raffish French-Canadian family, and of the first stirrings of adolescence in the boy of the lovable, if slightly disreputable, household, "The Happy Time" has a certain warmth and charm which atone for much of its ramshackle quality. Its central story takes an unconscionable time to pass a given point, but there are individual scenes of fresh and rewarding humor. Its characters are well-observed and engagingly deplorable, but have their tiresome moments.

The Comparisons

In short, "The Happy Time," despite Robert Lewis' skillful direction and the finished production the eminent team of Rodgers and Hammerstein has accorded it, strikes me as a desultory and only intermittently entertaining comedy, which rarely achieves the effectiveness of a satisfying play. The very fact that the comparisons with other plays come so immediately to mind is indication that this dramatization by Samuel Taylor of a book by Robert Fontaine lacks the complete individuality of a first-rate theatrical work.

The scenes which seemed to me the most successful are ones incidental to the main theme of the boy's development. There is an episode wherein a doctor of questionable skill examines the amorous grandfather of the family, and another in which the prim suitor of the drunken uncle's daughter unwittingly takes to alcohol, and both of them are funny in themselves. Nor are they by any means the only amusing moments of the new comedy. But "The Happy Time" often has difficulty in getting around to them.

Nostalgia

As everyone in the theatre seems to recognize by now, this is a great period in the national annals for being nostalgic about the quaint charm of the twenties, which now possess the wistful appeal for us that the nineties had for our fathers. In Mr. Taylor's play, the nostalgia consists in large part of memories of Rudolph Valentino movies, but, in addition, the atmosphere of French-Canadian life is pleasantly and quietly captured. Unfortunately, the work has too many stretches which are dangerously arid.

An excellent cast has been assembled for it. There are engaging performances by Edgar Stehli as the grandfather, Richard Hart as the romantic uncle who collects ladies' garters, Leora Dana as the understanding Scottish mother, Kurt Kasznar as the alcoholic uncle, and, in smaller roles, Gage Clarke as the doctor and James O'Rear as the suitor. The long and difficult part of the boy is ably managed by young Johnny Stewart. But best of all, I thought, is Claude Dauphin, who is warm and human as the father. Yet "The Happy Time" disappointed me.

Journal American
January 25, 1950

Entrancing Comedy Is Good, Clean Fun
By ROBERT GARLAND

Yes, an entrancing new comedy of life, love and adolescence is at the Plymouth. It is "The Happy Time." Its author is Samuel Taylor, out of a novel by Robert Fontaine. Its producers are Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2nd. Its cast is perfect. Its success is assured.

Under Robert Lewis' tough and tender direction, what easily could have been a smirky parody on what every growing boy should know is nothing of the kind. Not even when "The Happy Time" is at its most outspoken. Now, on 45th Street, sex is once more good clean footlighted fun.

This Messrs. Rodgers and Hammerstein non-musical has been on its way for most of half-a-dozen years. Its remakings have been nine. Its options have been seven. Its dramatizers have been four. Leland Hayward, Saint' Subber, Alfred de Liagre and the likes of them have had it on their agenda.

But Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein 2nd have made it the seventh offering of their six years as fellow showmen. They have, as usual, endowed it with their co-producing genius. It is a genius which, more than likely, is merely their infinite capacity for taking pains . . .

Whatever it is, "The Happy Time" arrives as one of the season's most thoroughly welcome incomers!

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Uninhibited Family

Yes, the action of "The Happy Time" takes place in Ottawa in the Early Twenties. It deals with a French-Canadian family by the name of Bonnard. A volatile, warm-hearted household, its members pursue their individual pleasures in uninhibited fashion.

These Bonnards — Papa, Grandpere, Uncle Desmonde and Uncle Louis — being men, the individual pleasures they pursue are women. Bibi Bonnard, who's getting to be a big boy now, is no exception to the lady-killing rule. He, too, wants what he wants when he wants it.

But, having been given the hush-hush treatment by Maman—she, like the other on-stage women, are Bonnards by marriage only—Bibi isn't sure what his growing pains desire. However, by doing what comes naturally and listening, he soon begins to learn.

His learning carries on through three acts and twice that many scenes at the Plymouth. It even takes you to the office of Bibi's principal at school, an incident, I wouldn't be surprised, that could be told about as amusingly and less awkwardly than it is shown . . .

At the final curtain, an unhurried one, Bibi is in his first long pants and every inch a Bonnard.

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Top Perfectionist

Yes, the cast of "The Happy Time" is perfect. As Papa, Claude Dauphin is a top perfectionist. I advise you to watch him closely. His tiny touches are so good, so Gallic, that you'll miss them if you don't. As a comedian, he is everything Milton Berle is not.

Richard Hart, once more back from Hollywood to give the legitimate a break, is right as Uncle Desmonde. Kurt Kasznar, to be remembered from "Joy to the World" and "Make Way for Lucia," remains this time within the play. This could be due to Robert Lewis.

Edgar Stehli affords no little fun as the Grandpere who has a well kept lady living down the street. But youthful Johnny Stewart, as Bibi of the House of Bonnard, holds "The Happy Time" together. Master Stewart is hereby added to Broadway's bright boy actors.

The women in the Bonnards' lives are also expertly handled. Leora Dana, recently the award-winning Irma of "The Madwoman of Chaillot," is a charming Maman. Eva Gabor, escaping for the first time from the Hollywoods, is a Mignonette Uncle Desmonde would marry . . .

Back where I started, "The Happy Time" is an entrancing new comedy of life, love and adolescence. See it!

NEW YORK Herald Tribune

January 25, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

A Real Happy Time

SAMUEL TAYLOR has written a tender, funny and moving account of French-Canadian family life in "The Happy Time." It is so ably interpreted at the Plymouth Theater that the new comedy ranks with an earlier Rodgers-Hammerstein production, "I Remember Mama." The author has shaped Robert Fontaine's novel of rather fragmentary reminiscences into a drama of consequence and continuity as well as humor. Claude Dauphin, Richard Hart, Leora Dana, young Johnny Stewart and their colleagues imbue it with immense life and laughter. Period plays of domestic turmoil and adolescent awakening have a way of becoming sticky. "The Happy Time" is as happy as the title would have one believe.

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The author has altered his original considerably, but that is all to the good. What is important is the fact that he has recaptured the spirit and sentiment of a book which gave tribute to the truth and love which bound a daffy clan together in Ottawa in the early '20s. The crazy violinist father, the Scotch Presbyterian mother, raffish old grandpere and bibulous Uncle Louis are endearing and comical characters. Bibi, on the threshold of manhood, is a completely engaging youngster. Their tilts with the varied problems of existence may not be very urgent, but they slip into a pattern of gladsome entertainment.

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If Taylor has stumbled at times, it is in his insistence upon mixing French and English phrases and odd translations of them. The device gives the dialogue a curiously angular effect, which is in dissonance with the smooth stream of action that culminates in Bibi's getting his first long pants. Despite that, there are few laggard passages in "The Happy Time," whether it is concerned with trivialities, or those small, weighty crises of family life. The scene in which Papa, Uncle Louis and the collector of ladies's garters, Uncle Desmonde, descend upon a hypocritical school principal and mend his ways, is wonderful and so is that bringing father and son together after the latter has confessed to stealing a comely visitor's nightgowns.

The acting might have left the show empty and vagrant. On the contrary, it builds up a splendid crescendo of humor and feeling. Dauphin is triumphant as Papa, giving the role a multitude of inflections, from high burlesque to the utmost seriousness. Miss Dana holds to a staunch and appealing portrayal of the Scotch mother, content to reflect much of the amusement in the unconventional doings of the work. Kurt Kaznar is splendid as the uncle who carries a water cooler filled with wine around with him and Hart is dashing as Uncle Desmonde. Stewart plays the boy with brilliant under-emphasis and Edgar Stehli and Eva Gabor add striking bits to the general hilarity. Robert Lewis has staged the piece neatly and Aline Bernstein has decorated it fetchingly. "The Happy Time" is a joyous addition to the season's offerings.

"Design for a Stained Glass Window"

Journal American

January 24, 1950

Carroll M'Comas Can't Save This Talkfest

By ROBERT GARLAND

If, come Candlemas, "Design for a Stained Glass Window" is remembered, it will be remembered as the William Berney-Howard Richardson talkfest which returned Carroll McComas to the New York stage. Last night, at the Mansfield, Miss McComas made her second professional debut.

Her first was in what vaudeville was wont to call a whistling act, single. From there she worked up to starring roles in productions by the Frohmans and Belascos. She played the title role in "Miss Lulu Bett," the Pulitzer Prize-winner. She was Roxanne to Walter Hampden's Cyrano.

Then marriage and retirement. Then widowhood. Now, after fifteen years, she makes her second professional debut as the Anne Tesh of a static Protestant-versus-Catholic set-to laid in Elizabethan York and produced in O'Dwyerian New York for no recognizable reason.

Save, as I have said, to bring Carroll McComas back to the Broadway which has missed her.

Needs Projecting

So static is "Design for a Stained Glass Window" that the greater part of it never crosses the footlights' barrier. You can hear it. You can see it. But it makes a negligible impression as you do. Sitting in an over-heated auditorium, it seems like none of your affair.

Only Carroll McComas as Anne Tesh, and, more often than the others, Charlton Heston as John Clitherow and A Dog as Azore, go about their acting like experienced members of the Actors Equity Association. Yet the piece wants more projecting than they can do.

Such narration as the Messrs. Berney and Richardson provide deals with a Mistress Clitherow who is determined to win the stained glass window of the title, even if she sacrifices her family, destroys herself and gets to be St. Margaret of York to do so.

All of which she does, winning her death and immortalization with the help of a small boy, branded.

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Receives Ovation

Carroll McComas, whose role of Anne Tesh is a comparatively minor one, brings humanity to a play that needs it very badly. It is happy I am, and heartened, to have Miss McComas once more on Broadway. Last night, at her second professional debut, she received an ovation.

Charlton Heston comes to his role of John Clitherow by way of the William Shakespeare version of the Cleopatra story. He is an assured and personable young actor, even when he wears his shirt in what, if affected by Miss McComas, would be known as decollete.

Hollywood, or something, has been hard on Martha Scott since she played Emily in "Our Town" in three dimensions. And Ralph Clanton, so memorable as Octavius Caesar in "Anthony and Cleopatra," is embarrassingly actorial as the Earl of Hartford—not Connecticut! . . .

But, thanks to "Design for a Stained Glass Window," which is a plodding and pretentious play, Carroll McComas is back on-stage again!

"DESIGN FOR A STAINED GLASS WINDOW"

Play by William Berney and Howard Richardson; staged by Ella Gerber; scenery and costumes by Stewart Chaney; presented by Jack Segasture in association with OBS Productions at the Mansfield Theatre, January 23, 1950. The cast:

Henry Maye....Neil Fitzgerald
William Clitherow.....
Charles Nolte
Tom Prior.....James Dobson
Anne Tesh...Carroll McComas
Robin Flemming..Ralph Clanton
Margaret Clitherow.....
Martha Scott
John Clitherow..Charlton Heston
Judge Clinch..A. Winfield Hoeny
Father Marsh.....John McKee
1st Guard.....Donald Barton
2nd Guard.....Winston Ross
3rd Guard.....Thomas Walsh
Little William...Joseph Fallon
Sally.....Kathleen Roland
Henry Clitherow...David Rosen
Peter van Lynch...Donald Rose
Robert Hueleston.....
Harry Mehaffey
Azore.....A Dog

Synopsis: Act I. The living room of the Shambles, an Elizabethan house in York. The time is an evening in spring, 1571. Act II. Scene 1. A Sunday morning in early autumn, two years later. Scene 2. A winter evening, ten years later. Act III. Scene 1. The following morning. Scene 2. Later that afternoon.

The New York Times

January 24, 1950

'Design for a Stained Glass Window' Tells Story of Persecution for Religious Belief

By BROOKS ATKINSON

The theme of "Design for a Stained Glass Window" deserves a finer play than the one William Berney and Howard Richardson have written. Dipping back into the bloody history of Elizabethan England, they are dramatizing the martyrdom of Margaret Clitherow, who was persecuted by the Queen's Men for her belief in Roman Catholicism.

As playwrights they lack taste. But when the political tyranny of the crown finally traps Margaret and condemns her for her faith, "Design for a Stained Glass Window" lays hold of the hearts of the audience. For this is one of the most ancient of evils and no one is innocent of conspiring in it.

* * *

In this instance a Roman Catholic is condemned for adhering to beliefs that go contrary to the politics of the nation. But the incident is less horrifying than the principle. For Protestants and Jews have been murdered for heresies as well as Catholics. And in the modern world political heresies are punished ruthlessly also—less savagely in this country than in the Soviet bloc where men are shot or driven into concentration camps. But when the heresy fever is on us, we harry the sinners, too.

Until the law catches up with Margaret Clitherow in the last act, Mr. Berney and Mr. Richardson indulge themselves in some pretty hackneyed writing. Their sketch of local life in an Elizabethan house (ironically called The Shambles) comes straight out of the doublet-and-hose story books. The villains are swagger; the virtuous people are cloying; the narrative is pedestrian and the writing, turgid.

But no one with a drop of sincerity in his ink can overwrite the scene in which the law and the police invade a home, search it for evidence of political treason and find the victim. Being a great writer, Shaw made something remarkable of the inquisition scene in "St. Joan." The lines, the principles and the arrangements of that scene are burned into the hearts of all the playgoers who saw it. Mr. Berney and Mr. Richardson are not writers of that quality. But their final scene in which Margaret Clitherow faces her imposingly caparisoned accusers is solemn and sobering. The evil of the ages makes a frightening spectacle.

Since the direction by Ella Gerber is frequently as tasteless as the writing, the performance of "Design for a Stained Glass Window" includes considerable bombast and attitudinizing. But the cast has some good actors in it, many of whom have doubtless been attracted by the reverent implications of the theme.

Charlton Heston, Carroll McComas, John McKee, Ralph Clanton, Charles Nolte and James Dobson give satisfactory performances, most of which could be improved by fastidious direction. Martha Scott plays the part of Margaret Clitherow pleasantly and modestly through the early parts of the play. In that final scene when she faces the law alone and accepts her tragic destiny, Miss Scott plays with a sincerity, frankness and strength that are wholly admirable.

She touches the conscience of every man and woman in the audience. At one time or another everyone has stood by silently while others have been persecuted for their beliefs.

Daily Mirror

January 24, 1950

'Stained Glass Window' Not Majestic Enough

By ROBERT COLEMAN

In "Westward Ho!" Charles Kingsley, clergyman-novelist, painted a vivid picture of Elizabethan England during its great period of exploration and expansion, culminating in the destruction of the Spanish Armada. Kingsley, being an Anglican, sided with Queen Elizabeth against Catholicism, which in that period had to go underground.

And last season, Maxwell Anderson contributed an illuminating study of a preceding and preparatory period, the reign of Henry VIII, in "Anne of the Thousand Days." It was Henry who broke with Rome because of his romantic and marital propensities, and established the Church of England to serve his purpose.

Now, William Berney and Howard Richardson give us "Design for a Stained Glass Window," which Jack Segasture brought to the Mansfield Theatre last evening. They are concerned with that part of Elizabeth's rule when the Queen had finally been excommunicated by the Pope and had decided to wage civil war to the death on her Catholic subjects, who gave allegiance to Rome.

They are more immediately concerned with the case of Margaret Clitherow, who went to death by torture rather than renounce Catholicism. Her martyrdom came partly as a result of her decision to marry John Clitherow instead of his partner, Robin Flemming.

Flemming, injured by Clitherow, renounced his faith, amassed a fortune with Drake in the West Indies, became the Earl of Hartford and a favorite of Elizabeth. Placed in charge of exterminating heretics to the Church of England, jealousy and a desire for revenge caused him to bring about the condemnation and death of Margaret.

Berney and Richardson have written a sincere and sometimes moving play, but we think they have failed to invest it with the philosophic insight.

Martha Scott is a lovely and earnest Margaret, though she does not bestow sufficient conviction and fervor upon her. Ralph Clanton gives a dynamic, beautifully read and stylized performance as the vindictive Flemming.

"Design for a Stained Glass Window" has so much to recommend it, that we can only regret it hasn't enough. If Berney and Richardson had been able to give it the drive, color, feeling and imagination of their "Dark of the Moon," our duty this morning would be a happier one.

New York World-Telegram and The [illegible] Sun

January 24, 1950

Clash of Religions On Mansfield Stage

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

"Design for a Stained Glass Window" tells of the making of a potential Saint, in the life story of Margaret Clitherow, an English woman who actually lived in the time of Queen Elizabeth.

Margaret was baptized as a child in the Catholic Church, but at the age of 10, when Elizabeth turned against Pope Pius V, Margaret and the rest of her family, except for her father, became Conformists and joined the Protestant Church.

The play starts with Margaret's return from her honeymoon after her marriage to John Clitherow, an ambitious butcher.

Death for Their Belief.

John's brother William is a devout and actively loyal Baptist, as is Anne Tesh, a close friend. At William's urgent request, and against John's wish, they hide a priest who turns out to have baptized Margaret as a child. Circumstances and associations lead Margaret to re-embrace the Catholic religion. At approximately the same time, a jealous suitor of hers, Robin Flemming, opportunistically turns Protestant.

It is William's death for his belief, that actually turns Margaret Catholic, and soon she is permitting mass, and arranging for the education of children in her faith. She even finally sends her oldest son to France where he can be raised openly as a Catholic.

In time Robin becomes an Earl, and still vengeful, reveals Margaret's secret activities. Because in a jury trial, her husband and children would have to testify against her, she refuses to plead to the charges, since Catholics are royally declared traitors, and is sent to death by torture.

Actors Play It Straight.

This is all told in a straight forward manner which starts out

with a fair amount of action, but gradually gets bogged down under a weight of words. The language is never elaborately period, but remains simple and understandable throughout.

The play's chief fault is a lack of characterization. The people in it are there for one purpose apiece, and they have no normal contradictions or facets. This leads the actors to playing very straight, and results in a lack of texture for the play.

Martha Scott plays the principal role, with gentle simplicity. Because she underplays, the dedication of this woman becomes a thing of real force, though it never assumes a very dramatic significance. Miss Scott has a peaceful shine in her playing, that allows the conflict between mortal and spiritual love to resolve itself believably.

Anne Well-Played.

As the neighboring Anne, Carroll McComas is splendid. She is lusty and vivid, and the play loses much of its interest when she leaves the picture.

Charlton Heston is forceful and straightforward as the husband, and Ralph Clanton is entirely at home and authoritative in the fairly obvious role of Robin.

Charles Nolte and James Dobson are effective in smaller roles.

There is a rich, heavy setting, strikingly of the period, designed by Stewart Chaney.

New York Post
HOME NEWS
January 24, 1950

A Real Martyr Is Made Unreal

By Richard Watts Jr.

The story of Margaret Clitherow, a valiant Catholic martyr of the days of Queen Elizabeth, is retold by William Berney and Howard Richardson in an earnest, well-intentioned and hopelessly inept play, rather formidably known as "Design for a Stained Glass Window," which opened at the Mansfield Theatre last night.

The new drama by the authors of the imaginative "Dark of the Moon" tries seriously to be a significant plea for freedom of opinion and against thought control, but it is hopelessly entangled in feeble theatrics.

Although the playwrights are telling as factually as they can the history of the quiet, courageous young woman who sacrifices her home and her life because she will not recant her religious beliefs, it seems clear that they have a contemporary moral in mind. By describing a celebrated case in church annals, they appear to be reminding us of the evil of suppressing opinion, even when done in the name of patriotism and in the conviction that the upholders of unpopular ideas are actually agents of a foreign power.

Lack of Persuasion

At least, this is my impression of what the drama is endeavoring to imply. It is a little difficult to tell, though, because "Design for a Stained Glass Window," to give its full name for the last time in this review, is so clumsy in both its story-telling and its expression of ideas. For one thing, as the leading role is written and as Martha Scott plays it, there is great difficulty in believing that Margaret Clitherow is really a woman driven to martyrdom by the passion of her convictions. Never is there persuasion in the part.

While it is clearly not the play's intention, the one really sympathetic character is not the martyr but her husband, even though the role is an undeveloped one. Subsidiary to the central theme as he is, there is more hint of drama in the tale of this husband, a charitable, kind-hearted man, loyal to his wife but without any strong religious convictions of his own, who is unwittingly the victim of his wife's passionate belief, than in the story the authors set down. He is like one of those Innocent bystanders in "Montserrat."

In Shaw's magnificent "Saint Joan," religious persecution is made all the more horrible because the Inquisitor is a splendid, upright man and his ideas are so winningly plausible. The new play, which shouldn't be mentioned in the same paragraph, loses what value it might have had because the persecutor is shown as a jealous, vengeful, scoundrel and his persecution of his victim becomes merely the clumsiest of melodrama. It ceases to be the tragedy of ideas and becomes the story of personal vengeance.

Neither acting nor staging is of much help. Miss Scott can be an interesting actress but her Margaret Clitherow is never credible. Ralph Clanton makes the persecutor a melodramatic villain, and Charlton Heston has little chance to do anything with the role of the husband. The other parts are blurred and ineffective. Although the new play tells a real and tragic story, it is never real nor tragic in the telling.

DAILY NEWS
January 24, 1950

'Stained Glass Window' Is Lovely To See but Not Exciting to Hear

By JOHN CHAPMAN

The third of this season's plays about spirit and religion, "Design for a Stained Glass Window," was given a visually gorgeous production at the Mansfield Theatre last evening.

It has neither the pleasant simplicity of Rosemary Casey's "The Velvet Glove" nor the intellectual magnificence of T. S. Eliot's "The Cocktail Party." I found it honorably conceived but rather tiresomely executed.

William Berney and Howard Richardson, the authors, present what I take to be the case history of one Margaret Clitherow, who lived in New York in Queen Elizabeth's time and was martyred for her faith in the Church of Rome. But I had a feeling last evening that Messrs. Berney and Richardson had somehow missed communicating the courageous devotion of a consecrated woman. I was not stirred as I should have been—and as I have been at Shaw's "Saint Joan" and Maxwell Anderson's "Joan of Lorraine."

Third Act Trouble.

Martha Scott plays Margaret Clitherow gently and quietly—too gently and quietly, perhaps. But the emotional failure of "Design for a Stained Glass Window" must largely be the fault of the authors, for they have put in many too many words. This prolixity is most apparent when it should be least apparent—in the third act, when events are moving toward the execution by torture of a martyr.

Theirs is a complicated story of the time when Queen Elizabeth was excommunicated by the Pope—a time when war was declared on Papism in England and priests and practitioners of the Roman faith were in danger of their lives. Miss Scott plays the wife of a prosperous young butcher. In their city, many Catholics find it expedient to renounce their faith. The young butcher becomes a Protestant and rises high in political circles; his wife will not renounce and deliberately removes herself from her beloved husband and children by choosing death.

There are enough sub-plots, including one about the woman having jilted a suitor who later became the Earl of Hartford, to keep a play scenario lively—but somehow the words slow it down.

Stewart Chaney has designed a magnificent Elizabethan house and has clad its occupants and visitors respendently. Charlton Heston, as the husband; A. Winfield Hoeny, as a judge, and Ralph Clanton, as Hartford, play well. Ella Gerber directed.

"Design for a Stained Glass Window"—*continued*

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
January 24, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Broken Glass

A DIFFUSE and awkward stage biography of a Catholic martyr has opened at the Mansfield. In "Design for a Stained Glass Window" William Berney and Howard Richardson have celebrated Margaret Clitherow's refusal to abjure her faith in the Elizabethan period. The authors, who happen to be Southern Protestants, have treated their work with more dignity than imagination and passion. Although Martha Scott gives a sometimes translucent portrayal of the central figure and Stewart Chaney has designed an effective period setting for the action, the play is ponderous rather than uplifting.

* * *

For one thing, Berney and Richardson have never centered clearly on the unshakable belief which caused the mother of three children to choose a slow and agonizing death, although there was scant evidence of treason to her queen. The title derives from a dream which she has in an early scene in which she sees herself suspended in space, broken up into bits of broken glass and forced into a church window. This revelation in no way explains the disjointed events which follow. In the end it is a former lover and suitor who hunts her down with vengeful jealousy and sends her to her doom. Neither the abstract idea of faith, nor the human drama which might have made it implicit in the lines and situations, have been stated with any clarity in "Design for a Stained Glass Window."

* * *

One suspects that the writers became as much intrigued with the late sixteenth century in Yorkshire as their religious theme. There is considerable bustle as the town officials of York, the queen's men, a fugitive priest and several youngsters, not to mention a dog, come on and off stage in fancy costumes. There is some talk about secret masses being held in the Clitherow house and much more about the fate of the Papists captured by Elizabeth's soldiers. In the midst of the pageantry, poor Margaret takes on few dimensions, even though the work stretches over a dozen years.

Miss Scott is not at fault. When she is resolutely holding to her faith through a time of terror for Catholics, she has moments of serene authority. The climax finds her achieving a certain exaltation as she makes a fateful decision. For too much of the time, she is just a pleasant housewife with a nice butcher husband. Charlton Heston is good in the latter part and Charles Nolte contributes a moment of melodramatic excitement when he staggers into a living room to receive the final sacrament. Neil Fitzgerald, Carroll McComas, Ralph Clanton, A. Winfield Hoeny and John McKee are some of the other players. The staging by Ella Gerber is busy without being definitive. "Design for a Stained Glass Window" is sincere and soporific.

"The Cocktail Party"

New York Post
HOME NEWS
January 23, 1950

The Theatre Event of the Season

By Richard Watts Jr.

The theatrical season took on stature Saturday night, when T. S. Eliot's "The Cocktail Party" had its first American performance at the Henry Miller. The greatest of living poets has been trying to storm the drama for a long time, but at last he has mastered it, and his new work, which is technically in verse but hardly seems to be, is an authentic modern masterpiece, one of the two or three finest plays of the post-war English-speaking stage. Since it is not only beautifully written but extraordinarily effective dramatically, and the acting is nothing short of superb, there is cause for rejoicing today.

In "The Cocktail Party," Mr. Eliot, the American-born Briton, is telling, with perception, earnestness, humor and a trace of his highly personal mysticism, the story of some civilized, urbane, rather frivolous people, under whose facade of bright superficiality there lies the neurotic sense of frustration characteristic of modern society. His central figure is a successful psychiatrist, part scientist, part man of the world, and part mystic, who moves quietly and somewhat enigmatically among them, causing them to face their spiritual unrest by daring to look upon themselves without illusion.

Although this brief outline of the narrative is accurate enough, it is also deceptively superficial. Being a play of stature and thoughtfulness, "The Cocktail Party" has interests upon more than one level, and while its story is dramatically effective in itself, it serves chiefly to express Mr. Eliot's provocative and somewhat mystic ideas of God and man and modern society. It is a subtle play but not really a difficult one, and although it demands a considerably closer attention on the part of its audiences than do most contemporary works in the theatre, it is absorbing on whatever level it is contemplated.

It is one of the loftiest virtues of the play that each spectator is likely to find different ideas and symbols in it, depending on the qualities of heart and mind he brings to it. Granting, therefore, that this is merely a personal interpretation of "The Cocktail Party," it appears that the author is expressing a point of view which is just the opposite of that eloquently stated in another distinguished post-war drama, "The Iceman Cometh." While O'Neill told passionately of the world's need for illusion to sustain it, Eliot insists more urbanely that our illusion must be dropped and reality faced.

It appears, too, that Eliot divides mankind into two categories. One is that of the average human being, who must understand that the second best in life is all he can get, and that he can exist satisfactorily if he accepts it. But there is also the saint, and to him nobility and sacrifice are the natural and rewarding way. I must point out quickly, though, that the play is no mere discussion of philosophies, however interesting. It is also a drama of great emotional and theatrical effectiveness, and, since its slightly complex text has been brilliantly staged by E. Martin Browne, it never ceases to be alive.

At its best, English acting has a lucidity, polish and dexterity that are incomparable, and here it is to be seen close to perfection. Although I have heard a lot about Alec Guinness, who plays the doctor, I had never before seen him, but, on the basis of this one brilliant performance, I think it is quite possible that he is the most accomplished actor extant. There is a splendid characterization of a troubled husband by Robert Flemyng. Irene Worth gives a sensitive, lovely portrayal of an idealistic girl, and Eileen Peel is delightful as the wife. Cathleen Nesbitt and Ernest Clark are admirable as family friends and Grey Blake helps as a Hollywood writer. This is the stage at its illustrious best.

"THE COCKTAIL PARTY"

Play by T. S. Eliot; staged by E. Martin Browne; scenery by Raymond Sovey; presented by Gilbert Miller, by arrangement with Sherek Players, Ltd., at Henry Miller's Theatre, January 21, 1950. The cast:

Edward Chamberlayne.....
Robert Flemyng
Julia (Mrs. Shuttlewaite)...
Cathleen Nesbitt
Celia Coplestone...Irene Worth
Alexander MacColgie Gibbs..
Ernest Clark
Peter Quilpe.....Grey Blake
An Unidentified Guest.....
Alec Guinness
Lavinia Chamberlayne....
Eileen Peel
A Nurse-Secretary.....
Avril Conquest
A Caterer's Man...Donald Bain

Synopsis: Act I. Scene 1. The Chamberlayne's flat in London. Early evening. Scene 2. The same. Later in the evening. Scene 3. The same. The following evening. Act II. Scene 1. A consulting room in Harley Street. Two months later. Scene 2. The Chamberlayne's flat. Two years later.

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
January 23, 1950

= *By* HOWARD BARNES =

Modern Morality Play

T. S. ELIOT, who has dedicated himself to the resurgence of poetic drama, has written more eloquently than theatrically in "The Cocktail Party." The lines of this mystical allegory about faith, human relationships and the modern world have a savage and repetitious intensity. Under E. Martin Browne's direction at Henry Miller's Theater, the work has extraordinary and exhausting appeal. An able company, headed by Alec Guinness, Cathleen Nesbit and Robert Flemyng, keeps the verse controlled and communicative as Eliot examines the sickness of society. If the resolution of this imponderable thesis is confused, it is not the fault of an immaculate production.

Discarding a chorus because, in his own words, it merely serves "to bulk the play out," the author has composed an astringent and perceptive drama of a dissolving marriage. A psychiatrist, known as the uninvited guest at the party of the title, serves as a sort of commentator on much of the action, but Eliot has revealed each character in direct terms. For most of two lengthy acts, his prosody is fascinating and illuminating. Frequently it soars into the upper reaches of poetic imagination where every word is freighted with meaning and beauty. The symbolism of a morality play in modern dress is intelligible and engrossing. Unfortunately, there is too little emotional substance in "The Cocktail Party" and no catharsis.

* * *

The progression of events from a London cocktail party, at which the host finds himself deserted by his wife, to a doctor's office, where the principal characters are released from their particular hells, has an impressive cumulative excitement. A great poet has employed the stage to magnificent advantage in these scenes, combining scintillating humor with dramatic urgency. A hapless marriage in which a husband cannot love and a wife cannot be loved takes on enormous import. In Eliot's skein of verse, manners, morals and the spiritual aspects of existence are considered with wisdom and theatrical fluency. The climax, starting with an odd libation celebrated by the psychiatrist and two of the married couple's friends, is on a dying note.

* * *

Whatever qualifications one may make about "The Cocktail Hour," it is a work of stature. The characters take on luminous dimensions for the most part. However static the action, the words weave an irresistible spell of imagery. Since the players are eminently aware of their assignments, there is a clearly defined interpretation of various metrical forms. Guinness is particularly fine as the stranger who turns out to be a psychiatrist, changing brilliantly from a gin-drinking singer of raucous ballads to a correct and rapt Harley Street physician. Flemyng and Eileen Peel portray the estranged husband and wife who are brought together again with authority, even though their reconciliation is singularly unmoving.

* * *

Meanwhile Cathleen Nesbit is utterly delightful as a meddlesome matron, who gathers a dossier for the doctor, and Irene Worth is splendid as the husband's discarded mistress. It is a pity that her entering of a nursing order and crucifixion by natives of Kinkanja next to an ant hill inspire a morbid ending to a drama of high promise. Ernest Clark is good as one of the psychiatrist's accolytes and Grey Blake has a lively bit as the lover of the wife. Browne has kept the performers circulating with a minimum of explicit action and Raymond Sovey has designed handsome settings. "The Cocktail Party" is an eventful piece of theater, if somewhat disappointing.

DAILY NEWS
January 23, 1950

'Cocktail Party' a Masterpiece; Cast Gives Superb Performance

By JOHN CHAPMAN

T. S. Eliot's "The Cocktail Party," which was presented Saturday evening at Henry Miller's Theatre, is a masterpiece of the modern stage—and it is most beautifully acted by Alec Guinness, Eileen Peel, Cathleen Nesbitt, Irene Worth and the five other players Gilbert Miller has brought over from London.

Mr. Eliot, a Missouri-born Englishman, is a poet and a religious philosopher who, every few years, attempts a play in verse. Best-known of his stage works up to now was "Murder in the Cathedral," which was given 38 performances by the WPA Federal Theatre in 1935. It was, as I remember it, "interesting" but somewhat mannered; Eliot was looking for the best way for himself to write a play, but he hadn't quite found it.

A play in verse is a forbidding thing for the average theatregoer to contemplate, unless it is by Shakespeare. Our only successful dramatist who uses the metric medium is Maxwell Anderson, whose historical dramas and "Winterset" combine passages of prose with poetry in the high-flung Elizabethan style. Mr. Eliot is not working in the Elizabethan tradition or any other tradition; he is a modern poet, creating his own tradition as he goes along, and he finds great beauty in our language as we speak it today.

"The Cocktail Party" is verse because it is held to a deliberately contrived pattern of statement, even though there are no rhymes and jingles in it. It is poetry because it is beautiful. And it is a play because it is an absorbing, compassionate, inspiring and extremely witty story of the lives of three or four people. It has the bounce and cynicism of a frolic by Noel Coward, which makes it very entertaining—and it has a depth of understanding which makes it extraordinarily moving and inspiring.

Just a Party.

The beginning is where Edward Chamberlayne, a London barrister is forced to entertain some friends and acquaintances at a cocktail party all by himself, because his wife, Julia, who had planned the party, has suddenly left him. The guests include a very lovely girl with whom Edward has been having an affair; a gossipy, prying old lady about whom it is said, "Nothing less than the truth would deceive Julia"; a young writer who has fallen in love with the lovely girl, and a stranger whom nobody seems to know.

This stranger has the most baffling self-assurance and an uncanny way of making people reveal themselves. He is, by trade, a fashionable psychiatrist—but by implication he is a religious mystic, or T. S. Eliot, or a being of unearthly compassion and perception. Within the framework of a fine drawing-room comedy, he operates to give his patients — and the audience, who also are his patients—a glowing sense of the divine nature of the soul.

I suppose that "The Cocktail Party" is basically Roman Catholic, for it touches upon the doctrine of original sin, and its most inspiring character, the girl, finds her own spiritual salvation through a deliberately chosen career of atonement which ends with her being, quite literally, crucified in a jungle where she has gone to nurse natives during a plague. But the amazing skill of this play is that it never preaches; it leaves a member of the audience, no matter what his faith, to do the preaching to himself while he is watching a sophisticated comedy being splendidly acted.

We're All Alone.

I'll touch on the story very briefly, for the proper way to get it is to let Eliot tell it to you himself, at Henry Miller's. The couple who have become separated, the Chamberlaynes, have discovered that they are complete strangers after five years of marriage—and they are desperately lonely. Says the husband, "At every meeting we are meeting a stranger." Or maybe it was the stranger who explained that. Says the husband, "Hell is oneself." Each of the two has tried a love affair and has made the universal discovery that a human being—if he is so human that he has no other escape—is damnably and terribly imprisoned within himself.

The psychiatrist works out a good compromise for these two by persuading them to try again with the give-and-take that decent strangers should accord each other at every meeting. But the young girl, who is jilted by her lover and doesn't love the young man who loves her, is a more profound problem. She, too, is a prisoner within herself and has been struggling to give something of herself away. She feels sinful not because of any breach of the human sexual code, but because the love within her has found no release. The psychiatrist has directed the married couple to an easy, practical path for reconciliation; the girl he puts on the finer path of spiritual selflessness which leads to death.

I'm sorry to have been so long about this, but I think "The Cocktail Party" is an unusual work. It is one of the most enjoyable comedies imaginable, and its performers are splendid. Mr. Guinness, as the psychiatrist, is so intelligent and charming and right as to be superb. Miss Nesbitt is a delight as the old gossip. Miss Worth, an American girl who has been acting in London the last few years, is one of the most graceful and sensitive young actresses I have seen. Robert Flemyng and Miss Peel do fine work as the husband and wife.

"The Cocktail Party"—*continued*

The New York Times
January 23, 1950

AT THE THEATRE

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Being a mystic as well as a poet, T. S. Eliot has written a verbose and elusive drama that has to be respected. For it comes out of the private reverie of a man of purity, mind and character. It is "The Cocktail Party," which was wonderfully well acted by an English company at Henry Miller's on Saturday evening. Mr. Eliot is not an idiomatic theatre writer, nor an idiomatic verse writer, for that matter. But this drama about the souls of some contemporary people is closer to theatre than any of his previous plays. It comes closer to being a public expression of his private ideas.

* * *

They are religious ideas. In the first act he assembles a group of English people who have lost their way through the labyrinths of polite society. Lavinia Camberlayne has just left her husband without remembering to cancel a cocktail party she had arranged. Her husband is both annoyed and depressed. Suspecting what has happened, his mistress is elated by the expectation that he will now be free to marry her. But he finds that he wants his wife back. In the third scene of the first act she returns.

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Since they are rootless and apparently on the verge of nervous breakdowns, Mr. Eliot sends them all to a psychiatrist in the second act. For the psychiatrist is the father-confessor of modern people who have no basic religion. As the play moves on, Mr. Eliot gives his psychiatrist more and more religious authority and turns over to him the spiritual destiny of his principal characters. The psychiatrist restores the husband and wife to each other by removing their illusions. All they need is psychic adjustment. But the other woman he selects for a higher destiny—for a life of dedication, selflessness and martyrdom.

* * *

Why? The reasons obviously he concealed in the figured verse to which Mr. Eliot has confided his thoughts and religious faith. No doubt they are all there for theatregoers who are in tune with him, who can invade his spiritual privacy and who have faith in metrical abstractions. But today's report is written by one theatregoer who does not understand Mr. Eliot's dogma but recognizes that it is genuine and worth understanding by means of the script, since it is too compact and too allusive to be assimilated from the stage.

No one can blame the performance. It has been directed by E. Martin Browne, who has long been thoroughly grounded in the Eliot mystique; and it is acted by some lucid and accomplished players who know how to speak the English language.

Although the theme of the play is esoteric, the performance is thoroughly intelligible and enjoyable. Robert Flemyng as the boorish husband who finds spiritual release in learning the truth of his wife's character, and Eileen Peel as the wife who learns to know her husband — both give plastic, balanced performances of sensitive quality. Irene Worth finds the lonely depths in the character of the other woman in a remarkably skillful, passionate and perceptive performance. As the psychiatrist, Alec Guinness is superb — casual and amusing in the early scenes but rising to considerable spiritual eminence in the last act.

* * *

Cathleen Nesbitt is humorously animated as a garrulous busybody who flutters in and out of the play. Ernest Clark as a somewhat enigmatic man of far-flung affairs and Grey Blake as an aspiring writer complete the cast of the principal characters by giving good performances. As scene designer, Raymond Sovey has housed the actors pleasantly in an attractive drawing room and a sober consulting room for a fashionable psychiatrist.

Although "The Cocktail Party" has a worldly title, it is the most unworldly of plays, and since the characters have no life outside the drama, they are hardly more than illustrations for Mr. Eliot's ideas. "The Cocktail Party" is Mr. Eliot's best theatre work so far—his earnestness as a man of faith sustaining it through three hours of solid thought. But it would be hard to overlook the fact that the most essential parts of it are not resolved in terms of theatre and leave a theatregoer impressed without being enlightened.

Journal-American
January 23, 1950

Here's a Masterpiece; A 'Comedie Humaine'

By ROBERT GARLAND

T. S. Eliot's "The Cocktail Party," at Henry Miller's, is a masterpiece, worthily performed. Gilbert Miller honors the playgoers of New York and the playhouse of his father by presenting it here and there before exhibiting it in London. As of Saturday, Mr. Miller's importation takes its place as the one great comedy in town.

In this, his third theatre-piece to reach the English-speaking stage—the others are "Murder in the Cathedral" and "The Family Reunion" — the American-born Englishman has written a comedy in the best tradition of the ancient and honorable world of professional make-believe. A great comedy, as old as the theatre in its ecumenicity!

And as modern as an atomic bomb in its method and motivation. In "The Cocktail Party," T. S. Eliot deals with people of today in verse—you may not recognize it as verse until you are "lifted up into poetry"—which is their contemporary. Here, a living poet-playwright creates his medium. In today's theatre, there is nothing like it.

Believing, as Mr. Eliot told Martin Browne, his appreciative director, that the poet in the theatre must first be a dramatist, "The Cocktail Party" is a great play with the poetry serving as the natural means of expression for its characters. A great play, with all too human characters.

* * *

Greatest in Verse

If all this poetry and greatness goes against your approved theatregoing grain, forget it. Remember only that "The Cocktail Party" is a comedy. Not a gagged-up theatre-piece grovelling for guffaws, but a comedy that is by way of being a mid-Twentieth Century, and Anglo-Saxon, comedie humaine.

It opens with the Chamberlayne's cocktail party to which Lavinia does not come. On the surface, this is as light and laughable as "Clutterbuck." Here you meet Edward Chamberlayne and hear about Lavinia. They, man and wife, have been unfaithful to one another after their fashions. You meet, too, an interesting Unidentified Guest.

As "The Cocktail Party" moves into Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly's consulting room, the underlying and serious theme becomes steadily more manifest. The scene between Sir Henry, who turns out to be the Unidentified Guest and a famed psychiatrist, is as expert as the modern theatre provides.

The rest, where the story is concerned, is the double triangle with, thanks to the messianic doctor, a tragically happy denouement. But, if you sit up in your chairs and listen, there is more than meets the ear at Henry Miller's. Among that "more" is greatness. In verse!

* * *

Cast Is Terrific

The cast assembled by Gilbert Miller and directed by Martin Browne is, with no exception worthy of "The Cocktail Party." It works as if it and the play were one. And, which is even more notable, it speaks the verse of T. S. Eliot as if it were the verse it is and they were not afraid of it.

As Sir Henry Harcourt-Reilly, first the Unidentified Guest and later the messianic psychiatrist, Alec Guinness is as provocative a performer as England has sent us recently. Seen here eight years ago in Terence Rattigan's forgotten "Flair Path," his is a cynical savior such as only the Atomic Age could conjure.

As the Julia who is also Mrs. Shuttlethwaite, Cathleen Nesbitt is a rare comedienne. Irene Worth, an American girl who has been making good in London, returns as Celia Coplestone. Her speaking voice is not in too happy contrast with the others. Eileen Peel and Robert Flemyng are right as the Chamberlaynes.

These and the others are T. S. Eliot's helpmates in the unfolding of his latest theatre-piece. Against in-keeping backgrounds by Raymond Sovey, they bring out the greatness in a great play and make it easier on the less appreciative members of the audience. This is not a play for everybody.

But it is a play for me, just as it was for Saturday's distinguished first-audience. I was glad to see that Ethel Barrymore, the American theatre's First Lady, had returned to see what the show business like which there is no business can do with a modern masterpiece such as "The Cocktail Party."

Daily Mirror

January 23, 1950

Eliot's Fine 'Cocktail Party' Goes Right to the Head

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Gilbert Miller honored the intelligence of New York playgoers by bringing T. S. Eliot's "The Cocktail Party" to Henry Miller's Theatre Saturday evening. One of the smartest audiences of the season, including the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, saluted the new arrival with affectionate applause.

We have always considered Eliot something of an intellectual snob. However, the new work is marked by humor, warmth and compassion. It is not in any way condescending, though it does demand from audiences as much as they can hope to get out of it. It is not escapist entertainment. You must sit forward in your seat and catch every word of it. An English critic who saw a try-out said: "Beautiful words—but what do some of them mean?"

We think he must have been rather an obtuse fellow. We don't guarantee that we got the full import of all the brilliant lines, but we think we did. Eliot must have been reading Einstein before he started to write this play, for in it he deals with relationships—human, rather than space—in time. He also must have been reading his Bible. The result is a synthesis of poetry, science and faith.

A London barrister is having a cocktail party. His wife is absent. He makes excuses. Among the guests is a stranger who seems to understand the confused, past and present, relationships between the participants and the absent wife. He is a psychiatrist, but he is more than that. He is a representation of God.

The husband and wife come to the psychiatrist. In his office it is revealed that she has been having an affair with a young writer. The husband has been having an affair with a young girl about town. The psychiatrist reconciles the husband and wife on their own petty, mundane level. But the girl, who later visits him, he guides into religion and eventual crucifixion while she is ministering to savages in a distant land.

There is the bare outline. But on it Eliot has spun a play of deep understanding. He has written it in language that has the stature of blank verse. He has wrestled with such titanic problems as individuality, spirituality, what we live and die by. We shall not attempt to quote any of his meaningful and eloquent dialogue. That is better heard in the theatre.

Particularly when it is spoken so magnificently by Alec Guinness, Cathleen Nesbitt, Robert Flemyng, Irene Worth, Ernest Clark, Elleen Peel and Grey Blake, under the inspired direction of E. Martin Browne.

We have heard much about Guinness from friends in England, and they were right. He is a great actor. His psychiatrist is luminous and moving. Flemyng, one of our favorite actors, appears to us to have some difficulty with Eliot's blank verse. His reading is not always effectively casual. Miss Nesbitt and Miss Worth handle their taxing assignments with distinction, as does Clark. Miss Peel and Blake have the paler roles, but do them justice.

"The Cocktail Party" is one of the great plays of our time. It lends lustre to the reputations of its author and its American sponsor. It is a wonderful experience in the theatre. It is a superb answer to those pessimists who say that our 'Fabulous Invalid' is on its deathbed. No theatre is expiring that gives us such mental and emotional stimulation. You must see it.

New York World-Telegram and The Sun

January 23, 1950

T. S. Eliot Analyzes 'The Cocktail Party'

By WILLIAM HAWKINS.

T. S. Eliot's latest play "The Cocktail Party" is a three-hour treatise on the uses of life, written in verse, and in dialogue. The fact that it is told in first person conversation, actually in a complex series of confessionals, is its only connection with the theater as we know it.

This sort of intellectual duel, devoid of physical action or overt event, is a kind of drama familiar in Europe. It has gone as far as necessary for us, decked in the charm and wit of Giraudoux. With little of either of those qualities, Eliot has written a didactic philosophical analysis, more suited to reading than hearing. I can see little reason why the American public should attempt to embrace it in this form.

"The Cocktail Party" tells no story that can be summarized. Four unhappy people are thrown into sudden contact with a seemingly superhuman psychiatrist, who offers them not happiness, but some kind of fulfillment.

Man and His Conscience.

From the glimpses of these people at their normal speed, one can only assume that they are appallingly irritating. They chatter, gossip, spy and betray, in a most commonplace manner. However average they may be, one wonders if they are worth the fuss, theatrically speaking.

Eliot appears to divide humanity into two groups. For both he ordains (in the person of the doctor) a doctrine of acceptance, insisting that decisions are irrevocable. For most people, his answer is that consciences cannot be cleared. A man must learn to live with his burdens and faults, rather than try to efface them, and just make the best of a bad job. This seems to me the defeatist attitude of a weary quitter, and not to be recommended.

Only the rare saint can atone for the cankers he has nurtured, or the frustration of his dreams, by complete abnegation of human dignity and comfort.

In line with this solution, the spiritual psychiatrist informs a sundered couple that each accuses the other of his own faults, and sends them off together with tolerance, which in time replaces the need for any understanding.

Solution for a Mistress.

The husband's mistress, who realizes that everything she wants is illusive, is sent off to a jungle nursing job, where she gives her life hideously for a miniscule achievement in human happiness.

There is surely much truth, because of human limitations, in what Mr. Eliot says, but his attitude is impotent. It seems to carry possible inspiration or solace only to the unproductive intellectual under a Socialist government. The "elite" he wants to preserve?

The poet's language is simple and elegant, rather than soaring or vivid. His dramaturgy is so elementary, that whatever symbolism may be involved in mechanical repetition is lost in monotony. If it were not for his other plays, one would conclude he knew no other way to halt a mood, than with a telephone, a door bell, or an arbitrary entrance.

An Expert Cast.

The play is performed by a British cast in a style of acting that is amazingly expert and intelligent. It also seems to me calculated, external and soulless. One feels that most of the scenes could be played exactly the same way if each of the actors had earlier chopped up his grandmother.

One example of this is the moment when the effective Miss Eileen Peel lights a match, says several lines, then applies it to a cigaret just before the flame reaches her fingers. Technically it is superb. And it is maddeningly distracting.

In another scene the warm, appealing Irene Worth plays a long sequence revealing a complex spiritual torture. Her assurance of gesture, expression and reading, her knowledge of just what effect she would create, is so secure, that you worry not a whit with, or for her.

Alec Guinness achieves a plastic omniscient air in the manner of a peacock aping Gypsy Rose Lee, which gives the doctor a rhythmic distinction from the other characters.

Cathleen Nesbitt has sinister moments with all her acclaimed innocence as a double-dyed pry, and Robert Flemying, alone of the cast, suggests the sort of insecurity that draws, occasional deep sympathy toward his corner.

"Dance Me a Song"

NEW YORK Herald Tribune
January 21, 1950

= By HOWARD BARNES =

Eager but Uneven

THE new musical melange at the Royale, "Dance Me A Song," has eager performers cutting capers in an exceedingly uneven revue. Too frequently they are bested by indifferent material. Joan McCracken, Lee Goodman, Jimmy Kirkwood, Ann Thomas, Biff McGuire, Bob Fosse and Bob Scheerer turn their talents to a variety of shindigs in this Dwight Deere Wiman production. There is even a trained dog, which pirouettes on its hind legs. Some indication of the texture of the show is the fact that a monologuist from the night clubs, Wally Cox, takes top honors for capturing its fugitive amusement.

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Unlike the "Little Shows," which Wiman presented some twenty years ago, "Dance Me A Song" gyrates wildly between excellent scenes and dismal numbers. The former include a comical take-off on a radio program for the kiddies, "Buck and Bobbie," written and performed by Goodman and Kirkwood and an even more hilarious lampoon of documentary films by James Shelton, in which the triumphant Cox appears. Shelton is responsible for most of the songs and the staging, but the best in the offering is "One Is A Lonely Number," with lyrics by Maurice Valency and music by Albert Hague. Although it employs the familiar simulated mirror device for a background dance, it is a delightful fragment of a helter-skelter musical.

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Miss McCracken demonstrates her command of several stage forms agreeably throughout the proceedings. She sings and dances a pleasant number, "Strange New Look," with McGuire and Scheerer; impersonates Lynn Fontanne in a skit which literally has the Lunts making a play out of the telephone book and goes to town in the production number of the climax. But in "Paper!", she is as hard put to it as her assistants in projecting a boring conceit. Ann Thomas has a fair number in "She's No Lady," in which she demonstrates how a gal can protect herself and McGuire is admirable in his numerous appearances.

* * *

Inspiration is at a low point throughout most of "Dance Me a Song." George Oppenheimer and Vincente Minelli have thought up an animated Charles Addams drawing which is scarcely worth a grin and Marya Mannes is responsible for a tasteless number about a board meeting of a brassiere manufacturing concern. Babe Hines and Hope Foye sing a couple of solos which can only be termed reminiscent and the dancing ensemble goes through familiar routines under Robert Sidney's supervision. The Jo Mielziner settings are effective enough for the most part and Shelton has had the good sense to keep the show fast-paced, if nothing else. "Dance Me a Song" is lively and colorful, but it is lean on entertainment.

"DANCE ME A SONG"

Musical revue with songs by James Shelton; additional numbers by Herman Hupfeld, Albert Hague, Maurice Valency and Bug Gregg; sketches by Jimmy Kirkwood, George Oppenheimer, Lee Goodman, Vincente Minelli, Marya Mannes, Robert Anderson, Mr. Shelton and Wally Cox, staged by Mr. Shelton; scenery by Jo Mielziner; costumes by Irene Sharaff; dances by Robert Sidney; orchestrations by Robert Russell Bennett; musical direction by Tony Cabot; presented by Dwight Deere Wiman in association with Robert Ross at the Royale Theatre, January 20, 1950, with a cast including the following:

Joan McCracken, Ann Thomas, Marion Lorne, Bob Scheerer, Erik Rhodes, June Graham, Wally Cox, Jimmy Kirkwood, Lee Goodman, Fosse and Niles, Tina Prescott, Biff McGuire, Hope Foye, Babe Hines, Cliff Ferre, Heidi Krall, Alan Ross, Donald Saddler and Cynthia Rogers.

DAILY NEWS
January 21, 1950

'Dance Me a Song' Is a Gay Revue Played by a Happy Young Cast

By JOHN CHAPMAN

In the first "Little Show" there was a shot heard as the curtain went up at the Music Box. Fred Allen came on to say that a man named Prologue had been shot right at the beginning of the show, and that he, a detective named something like Philo Vance, was working on the case. If you are lucky enough to be old enough, you have always remembered that "Little Show" as a happy time.

Well, there is something quite a bit like it now across the street from the Music Box, at the Royale Theatre. It is a revue titled "Dance Me a Song." It has a refreshing, happy air; it is beautifully and smartly set and costumed; it is alive with attractive young people of talent; its dances are swift and gay and its songs have a lilt; a good many of its sketches are really funny . . . and throughout its many numbers it has an air of good breeding and intelligence.

Clever Discoveries.

In "Dance Me a Song" the first thing that happens is a couple getting stalled in a wrecked taxi while they are trying to get to the Royale Theatre, because 45th St. is being dug up. A friendly pavement driller offers to get them in underground. So presumably they get in and the show starts.

The link between the old revue and the new one is Dwight Deere Wiman, who produced the "Little Show" with Tom Weatherly and who has produced "Dance Me a Song" with Robert Ross. It must be Wiman's gift for appreciating clever people which has made this new revue a winsome and prankisome entertainment.

Who's in it? Nobody much. Joan McCracken, the comedienne and dancer of "Oklahoma" and "Bloomer Girl," is about the only one with what Broadway would call a name. It isn't likely that you ever heard of a fellow called Wally Cox, who is just a young man with a nice face. I never heard of him—but he had me weeping with laughter last evening. He didn't do anything. He just talked in two sketches. In one he talked about a neighborhood character named Dufo, in a clever sketch burlesquing the documentary movie. In the other he was just a soda fountain dispenser chatting about his boss, his customers and things in general. Mr. Cox is a bright, brand new comedian.

Attractive Youngsters.

There are many attractive dancers and singers around, and another pair of comedians, Jimmy Kirkwood and Bob Scheerer, who have a couple of nice satires on the radio business. Bob Fosse, Bob Scheerer, Cliff Ferre and Mary-Ann Niles do some sprightly dances. Miss McCracken and Alan Ross perform a hilarious burlesque of the acting technique of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne.

Almost all of the 24 numbers in "Dance Me a Song" are either good or grand. Maurice Valency, the highbrow prof who adapts Jean Giraudoux plays has written the lyric of a nice song, "One Is a Lonely Number," for Albert Hague's music, and it has been enchantingly staged as a mirror dance. Ann Thomas, a young Gravel Gertie among comediennes, comes up with a song about Texas which is amusing.

All in All, It's Good.

Well, I can't list all 24 numbers, because there's got to be time and room to mention Jo Mileziner, the clever set designer; Irene Sharaff, a peerless costumer, and Robert Sidney, a dance director who seems to know how young people feel when they feel young. James Shelton has written sketches and songs and has directed the enterprise with good pace; other writers of words and music include Herman Hupfeld, Vincente Minnelli, George Oppenheimer and Mary Mannes.

"Dance Me a Song" is a bright, handsome revue. It not only dances and sings you some songs — it laughs you some laughs.

The New York Times

January 21, 1950

'Dance Me a Song,' a Miniature Revue With Music, Put On at the Royale Theatre

By BROOKS ATKINSON

Folks, the news is still a trifle doleful. "Dance Me a Song," which opened at the Royale last evening, looks like a carnival but sounds hackneyed and mechanical. Jo Mielziner has set it beautifully with sun-kissed settings and inventive devices; and Irene Sharaff has dressed it handsomely. Since they are both people of taste and skill, "Dance Me a Song" is pleasant to look at.

But it is always hard to put together a stimulating revue from material contributed by several platoons of authors and notesmiths. With the exception of two comic monologues by Wally Cox, a motionless dead-pan buffoon, the sketches in "Dance Me a Song" are undistinguished, most of the music is dull and none of the performers is quite ingenious enough to make a silken evening of mediocre material.

* * *

These comments are not very appreciative in view of the hard work and good-will that have gone into the performance. For the producers have rounded up a number of attractive young people who could dance a song if a song had been written for them. Joan McCracken is still a refreshing dancer—better when she sticks to the innocent style than when she tries mimicry or sophistication. Ann Thomas, with a tough manner and a raucous voice, is willing to be amusing. In one bullying Texas ballad which has a breezy tune, she is quite a lively customer.

Hope Foye can sing a sultry number with a good voice and a high temperature. Babe Hines, a singer with the shouting method, relieves the monotony by crowding some professional exuberance into a latter-day analysis of love. There are any number of swift-and likeable dancers — Mary-Ann Niles, Bob Scheerer, Cliff Ferre and Bob Fosse, to mention a few who do steps that are clearly impossible.

* * *

Something grateful should be said for the occasional numbers that amiably bring a little variety into the sequences of stock revue entertainment. There are funny parodies of Jimmy Fiddler and Louella Parsons, Hollywood's holiest monitors. There is an ingratiating dog number and also a caustic burlesque of those sentimental, folksy documentaries that make America look like a wardrobe of homespun virtues and delights.

But Wally Cox is the genius of the documentary. Standing in the center of the stage and keeping his voice at a conversational pitch, he tells a story of juvenile lawlessness that becomes increasingly hilarious. Toward the end of the evening he pokes into the mind of a soda-jerker with equally hilarious results. He has a talent for making stupidity enjoyable.

He is the most original item "Dance Me a Song" provides. Going back to the revered tradition of the "Little Revues" a couple of decades ago, this band-box circus is professional in showmanship and splendidly bendizened. But it lacks the freshness of "Lend an Ear" and the uniform, witty irreverence of "Touch and Go;" and it is less entertaining than it seems to be.

Journal-American

January 21, 1950

Droll Musical Newcomer

By ROBERT GARLAND

It's getting hard to tell one "new musical revue" from another. "Touch and Go" from "Alive and Kicking." "Alive and Kicking" from "Touch and Go." Or either of them from "Dance Me a Song," which Dwight Deere Wiman has established at the Royale.

At the next mass meeting of the Drama Critics Circle, I think I'll start a quiz show.

Is "Disenchantment" in "Touch and Go," "Alive and Kicking" or "Dance Me a Song?" Is "I Never Felt Better" in "Dance Me a Song," "Alive and Kicking" or "Touch and Go?" Is "I'm the Girl" in "Alive and Kicking," "Dance Me a Song" or "Touch and Go?"

This, I'm sure, will put the Seven Cold Men of Broadway on their memory-testing mettle.

In which of the "new musical revues" is David Lober? And David Burns? And David Safro? How many song-writers has "Touch and Go?" Who designed the choreography for "Alive and Kicking?" Who compared the costumes for "Dance Me a Song?"

And why not a "Consolidated New Musical Revue" combining the best parts of all three?

* * *

This "Consolidated New Musical Revue" would have several of the best parts of "Dance Me a Song" on its assembled program. Wally Cox, for instance. A droll newcomer to the Broadway stage, his self-made monologues are fresh and funny at the Royale.

I'd not have you miss his talk on Dufo or "It's His Money." Not for anything.

Or Babe Hines. You've not been new-musical-revue-ing until you've heard Miss Hines sing "Love" in the first act of "Dance Me a Song" and a second act bit of witchery which seems not to be listed in my program. It should be.

Or a to-be-expected burlesque of the radio, the most hilarious since the Hartmans'.

These, admitting a change in pace and taste since Dwight Deere Wiman's not-to-be-forgotten "Little Shows," are in the "Little Show"-man's bright tradition. And "Glee Club" by the ensemble. And Charles Addams' Folks at home . . .

And any number of Robert Sidney's dances. "Dance Me a Song" is rich in dancing.

* * *

"Dance Me a Song," unlike "Touch and Go" and "Alive and Kicking," has the tasteful Dwight Deere Wiman restraint upon it. While some parts of it are an improvement on some others, no part of it is really tasteless.

Some of it is beyond me. The newspaper scene, for instance. This, with A Newsboy, A Girl, A Rake and A Boy Friend, is much ado about the Philadelphia Bulletin. Or "The Lunts Are The Lunts Are The Lunts" which, obviously, they aren't.

New musical reviewer's may not like the Lunts, but they're never able to lump them!

And there's something about A Man and Wife going down into a Manhattan manhole at the start of "Dance Me a Song" and coming up out of it at the end. This I don't even pretend to appreciate. But I do appreciate the show's costumes and backgrounds . . .

In "Consolidated New Musical Revue," Mr. Wiman's will be represented more and less often than its rivals.

Daily Mirror

January 21, 1950

'Dance Me A Song' Just A Bit Off the Beat

By ROBERT COLEMAN

Dwight Deere Wiman has given us many distinguished musicals, but "Dance Me a Song," which he is presenting at the Royale Theatre in association with Robert Ross, is not one of them. Still, Wiman's record over 25 years entitles him to an occasional theatrical misdemeanor.

"Dance Me a Song" has been staged by James Shelton, who also wrote much of the material. Jimmy is a clever boy, but he's missed the boat this time. Scenic designer Jo Mielziner and costumer Irene Sharaff, both top-flighters, also are off the beam with a drab and tasteless production, and the dances by Robert Sidney are, for him, disappointingly ordinary.

The hit of the evening, for us, was a runty little fellow with an ingratiating kid smile named Wally Cox. Wally was smart. He brought his own material. He garnered the only solid laughs of the evening with his small-talk, sudden comedy twists and throw-away lines.

His description of a dumb cluck named Dufo, boss of a soda fountain, and an eccentric customer are gems. Never reaching for laughs, Cox won them anyway. As co-owner of a successful jewelry business, he's doing all right off-stage/ But should cuff-links and tie-pins ever go out of style, he can do okay with Dufo in the tony East side bistros.

Runners-up for comedy were Lee Goodman and Jimmy Kirkwood with a skit called "Buck and Bobbie," a satire on radio kiddie horror programs. They also brought along their own material which has stood the test in numerous niteries.

Dance standout of the show was Bob Scheerer, assisted by a waltzing dog. Joan McCracken, Ann Thomas and Erik Rhodes, all click troupers, get lost in the shuffle.

"Dance Me a Song" might be a buy on the floor of a de luxe cafe, along with a three-buck dinner, for a single tariff.